

# WISCONSIN PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK RK

Major themes of testimony presented at the Blue Ribbon Hearings that should be priority considerations moving forward:

1. **Revenue limits are unfair and are widening the gaps between "have" and "have not" districts.** We have seen countless examples of this at the public hearings. The negative impacts of this unfair system have been demonstrated in every corner of the state. There is simply no rationale to justify the current system, or to maintain it another year. Our children cannot sit on a one-legged stool. Phasing in a revenue limit minimum of \$12,000/pupil would be a start in more equitably funding our schools; fixing the funding formula and eliminating revenue limits would be even better.
2. **The funding formula should focus on meeting the specific needs of children.** A formula weighted for children's educational needs would level the playing field to more responsibly and equitably fund our schools.
3. **Special education funding, which has been frozen for a decade, is completely inadequate.** While the state once reimbursed 66% of special education costs, it now provides less than 26% of special education reimbursement, even as needs and costs continue to rise statewide. This funding crisis, coupled with the federal and state mandate to provide services, means local schools are forced to make cuts they cannot afford, to meet the needs of their most vulnerable students. This Commission could set things right by making the same commitment to our public schools that it made to private schools in the 2017-2019 budget: 90% reimbursement of special education costs. A commitment to funding at this level would be transformative for children and our schools and would address the equity concerns illustrated statewide.
4. **The teacher crisis is real.** Act 10, changes to teacher licensure, plus decades of belt-tightening and revenue limits have proven that when schools compete, students lose. Our districts cannot afford to compete for educators, and teaching becomes less desirable a profession the more they do - particularly for our rural schools. State incentives for entering the profession, maintaining high standards of licensure, and eliminating the "divide and conquer" politics of recent years are requisite to attracting and maintaining excellent teachers statewide.
5. **Private school tuition subsidies are creating an undue and unjustifiable burden on taxpayers and on our public schools.** Vouchers are not part of our constitutional obligation to provide equitable education opportunities, and have never been subject to approval by voters or to up/down votes by members of the legislature. The lack of transparency surrounding the program, the rapid expansions of the program at the expense of public school students, and the continued, disproportionate influence of the private school tuition subsidy lobby on legislation and elections is a significant problem. The Commission should recommend both full taxpayer transparency on voucher costs and spending, and a moratorium on further voucher expansion.

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## Key Considerations for the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding

A summary of concerns presented by districts and members of the public at the public hearings in Milwaukee, De Pere, La Crosse, Fennimore, Oshkosh, and Tomahawk.

### Overview

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**Every student in every public school in Wisconsin deserves equal access and equal opportunity to receive an equally excellent public education.**

The state is not currently meeting this obligation. To do so, our public school districts and community members have made clear their needs for a funding formula that is **predictable, sustainable, transparent, and adequate** to meet student needs.

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Wisconsin has a Constitutional, legal, and moral obligation to meet the educational needs of all students in public schools.

### Wisconsin Constitution, Article X, Section 3

**"The legislature shall provide by law for the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable; and such schools shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years."**

### Wisconsin Supreme Court Vincent v. Voight (2000)

In this lawsuit brought by over 100 districts claiming that Wisconsin's school funding system was not equitable because of spending disparities, the Wisconsin Supreme Court found the system constitutional. The court did rule that the state had an obligation to provide a **sound basic education** for all children: **"Wisconsin students have a fundamental right to an equal opportunity for a sound basic education. An equal opportunity for a sound basic education is one that will equip students for the roles as citizens and enable them economically and personally."** The court further noted that, **"An equal opportunity for a sound basic education ... takes into account districts with disproportionate numbers of disabled students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with limited English language skills.** So long as the legislature is providing sufficient resources so that school districts offer students the equal opportunity for a sound basic education as required by the constitution, the state school finance system will pass constitutional muster."

Testimony presented at the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding hearings has made clear that the state is **neither** meeting its Constitutional charge **nor** the Wisconsin Supreme Court's directive to provide sufficient resources for students in these categories.